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TAGS: PREL PGOV SP NATO

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH MFA'S DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) PolCouns and poloff paid an initial call May 17 with the MFA's newly-named Director General for Europe and North America, former Spanish Ambassador to Denmark and Lithuania Josep (Pepe) Pons. Previously, the Directorate General for North America had been combined with the Asia portfolio, an area in which Spain has very few interests. Under FM Moratinos, however, the MFA has reshuffled portfolios, combining North America with bilateral relations with Europe (EU issues will be handled in a different directorate).

¶2. (C) Pons told us that in his view the MFA's restructuring of departments to bring Europe and North America together was a good move, because there are few issues that do not touch both Europe and the U.S. Pons averred there was no contradiction in Spain's desire for excellent relations within an integrated Europe and strong US-Spain ties. He noted that most of his experience during his thirty year career has been working in Europe or on European issues, but said that he would address U.S. issues with equal vigor. However, he also indicated that the European portfolio -- including bilateral relations with some 25 European countries -- would require frequent travel.

¶3. (C) We noted to Pons that even as the USG has expressed disappointment with the Spanish troop withdrawals from Iraq, the USG looks forward to cooperating with Spain on a variety of issues. We noted that we have heard across the board from the new government -- from highest levels to lower levels and in the Parliament -- that the new government desires good relations with the U.S. We stressed that we looked forward to concrete steps to breathe life into this sentiment and to build our relationship. Pons agreed that counter-terrorism, as well as Afghanistan are two key areas of common interest. He said he had been charged by Minister Moratinos to come up with "visible areas of cooperation". Our common interests in Latin America, he agreed, also offered an area ripe for continued US-Spain cooperation. He also noted the GOS's appreciation for the U.S.'s strong support and assistance in securing the appointment of Spanish Ambassador Ruperez as Executive Director of the UN Counter Terrorism Committee.

¶4. (C) On Afghanistan, we stressed to Pons the importance of Spain's response to our request for augmenting Spanish troop presence there (this meeting took place before receipt of reftel, though the Afghanistan issue has been a subject of continued dialogue with the new government). We also took the opportunity to make clear that a Spanish vote in favor of the ICC UNSC rollover resolution would be one area in which Spain could show it still plans to cooperate with the U.S. Pons hedged a bit and said the GOS is taking a very close look at the issue, but "certain unfortunate circumstances" had arisen (a clear reference to the Iraq prisoner scandal: however, he is the first and only GOS interlocutor on the ICC rollover issue to directly and overtly connect the two issues) that made the issue more difficult. Pons noted that Moratinos had consulted on the ICC rollover issue with EU counterparts. (Note: Before and after this meeting, the USG has raised this issue at higher levels, including with Moratinos, who has expressed Spain's strong desire to abstain on the resolution).

¶5. (C) Comment: While the atmospherics of this first meeting with one of our primary interlocutors was pleasant, the impression we took away was that we will have to work on Pons in order to ensure he focuses appropriately on U.S.-Spain issues, given his broad bilateral Europe portfolio. As with other new GOS interlocutors, we heard the message that the government wants to have good relations with the U.S., as the Socialist government of Felipe Gonzalez had with the U.S. under Presidents Reagan and former President Bush. However, the devil remains in the details, and we will continue to stress our desire for concrete examples of cooperation.

ARGYROS